
Exhibit 6

WORLD | MIDDLE EAST

Lebanese Protests Triggered by WhatsApp Tax Rattle Government

Demonstrators blame officials for inciting sectarianism and advancing interests of regional powers



Protesters carry Lebanese flags and chant slogans in front of the government palace during a protest in Beirut on Friday.

PHOTO: NABIL MOUNZER/SHUTTERSTOCK

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BEIRUT—Thousands of people took to the streets across Lebanon against an intensifying economic crisis in the country, threatening to bring down a government caught between the demands of regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Friday's protests were triggered by a proposal the government put forward a day earlier to tax people for using WhatsApp, as it tries to generate enough revenue to service its huge debt pile. The rapid withdrawal of the proposal failed to assuage protesters frustrated by the government's failure to rein in corruption.

Activists on motorcycles zipped through the city, chanting antigovernment slogans and urging people to shut down the main highway running through the capital. On Thursday night, they burned barricades built from trash, wood pallets and garbage bins in downtown Beirut, an area popular with tourists.

In response, the government canceled a cabinet session on Friday and dispatched riot police to the streets in case the protests turn violent.

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Demonstrators from across the political spectrum called for the coalition government to resign, echoing anticorruption chants heard recently in Iraq and Egypt. The expanding regional outrage over perceived economic mismanagement and government incompetence has served as a reminder of the widespread regional protests during the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011.

At that time, the spark for regional demonstrations was a young Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in protest against police officers who routinely stole his fruit. This time, in Lebanon, it was a proposed \$6-a-month tax on WhatsApp, the popular social-messaging app.

The protests, which have been largely peaceful, threaten to bring down Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who has struggled to balance competing demands emanating from Saudi Arabia and Iran. Riyadh supports Mr. Hariri and his largely Sunni Muslim party, while Tehran backs the Shiite Hezbollah group, which is part of the coalition government. The Trump administration is also increasing pressure on Lebanon to contain Iran's influence in the country.



A protester shouts slogans against the government as he blocks the road in front a mosque in Beirut.

PHOTO: NABIL MOUNZER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Mr. Hariri tried to address the protesters' concerns on live TV Friday evening, promising to take action soon.

"I give myself a short period, which is 72 hours, for my partners to give me an answer that convinces me and convinces those who are expressing anger and the

international community,” the prime minister said. “Otherwise the conversation will change.”

Demonstrators blamed officials for inciting sectarianism and advancing the interest of regional powers at the expense of the Lebanese people.

The Saudi Embassy in Lebanon said on Twitter it would evacuate its citizens.

Protesters in Beirut chanted slogans heard across the Arab world.

“The people want the downfall of the regime,” they repeated as they marched through Beirut’s streets, echoing chants heard in Iraq and Egypt in recent weeks that have been met with severe government crackdowns.

Chief among Beirut’s woes is a currency crunch and shortage of U.S. dollars. The peg of the Lebanese lira to the U.S. dollar, which has endured for more than two decades, appears to be faltering. In the black market, conversion rates have gone up as high as 1,650 to the dollar, compared with the official rate of 1,507.

More than one million Syrian refugees have stretched Lebanon’s infrastructure to its limit. To make up for shortages in electricity and water provided by the state, households often have to buy from private suppliers, paying two bills for each utility.

Turkey’s incursion in Syria has ensured that Lebanon’s refugee crisis will persist as Syria’s security conditions grow more unstable.

Residents across Lebanon were further outraged earlier this week by the government’s inability to quickly contain wildfires that spread through the country’s Chouf Mountains.

Officials brought in police riot-control trucks with water cannon to contain the fires because firefighting helicopters weren’t being properly maintained. Hundreds of people fled their homes and a firefighter was killed while fighting the blaze.

“They spend millions on their fancy trips and all we needed was \$400,000 for maintaining the helicopters,” said Redwan Mortada, a retired math teacher who joined the demonstrations on Friday. “They could have given us that at least. They would have even still made money off of it through their commissions.”

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